



EDUCATION FORUM 8-11 OCTOBER 2023 TOULON FRANCE "ANOTHER TOULON MOMENT"

On a beautiful autumn Sunday 8 October around 90 delegates gathered in Toulon to address difficult issues. Do we want to continue Marist education in Europe? Can we do this when the Marist Fathers province of Europe is heading for extinction? The Provincial Chapter of June 2022 requested a Forum on this subject. Each school sent delegates according to their student populations. The provincial council, the *Tutelle* which governs the French establishments, the MEA which governs the Irish schools and a strong delegation from Germany were present. The Superior General and two general counsellors along with those Marists still working in schools also attended.

The task on **day one** was twofold: to define Catholic education today and identify the specific Marist contribution to it. Prof McKinney homed in on the person of Mary and the distinctive Marist charism which he described as "the key to your future". Everything will depend on the quality of leadership, and on how lay Marist leaders are identified and formed. In the light of his intervention, delegates worked at identifying the key elements in Marist education. The day ended with a student concert and dinner at Cours Fenelon, one of the three Toulon schools.



DEAR MARIST FRIENDS

According to Pope St John Paul II, there are no coincidences. Earlier this year, one of the speakers on a renewal course in a Redemptorist house in Scotland had to drop out.

He was replaced by Prof Stephen McKinney of the University of Glasgow. An authority on Catholic education, he gave some input on the significance of Mary that so impressed Jean-Marie Bloqueau who was following the course that

Stephen ended up giving the keynote address at a forum on the future of Marist education in

Europe that was held in Toulon last month. When the 90 plus delegates at the forum were asked what they found most useful, Prof McKinney's introductory speech was mentioned more than anything else.

Usually, EuroInfo has three or four different topics. This month it is devoted exclusively to this forum. There was a degree of communion and an energy that took everybody by surprise. The general feeling was of having participated in something enjoyable, surprising and important.

Kevin Duffy, sm

PRAYER INTENTION:

that the Holy Spirit will guide the follow-up to the Toulon forum



Day two addressed the question how to organise Marist education to ensure a legacy for the future. Several different scenarios were discussed. The overwhelming majority of delegates favoured trying to develop the present structures, substituting lay Marist leadership for that of the European Marist Fathers, with ultimate authority lying with the General Administration in Rome.



The day ended with visits to the three education establishments in Toulon, a Mass celebrated by Fr John Larsen and a festive meal. In his homily, in the chapel of the church of Ste Marie La Seyne-sur-Mer, the first Marist school apart from Fr Colin's Belley, the Superior General stressed the link between ensuring a Marist legacy in education and the call to be truly missionary.

Fr John Larsen reminded delegates that:

"the first generation of Marist missionaries set out on their journey to the ends of the earth from Toulon. Perhaps, we can consider this Forum yet another Toulon-moment of Marist mission!"

Day three had three elements. In the morning, local and national groupings met, and there was a general sharing of impressions from the three days. In the afternoon, the French Tutelle, the Irish MEA, German representatives, the General Administration and the Provincial Council came together to identify a possible road map for the future. It became clear that a lot of work remains to be done!

In his closing remarks, Kevin Duffy highlighted the energy and dynamism of the lay Marist leadership revealed during the Forum and the presence at the Forum of Albert Kabala, Superior of the African District. Lay leadership and cooperation with Africa are part of our future.



A final quote from a participant:

"The overwhelming support from the delegates to remain Marist was humbling and wonderful to experience."

Frank Dowling
Education Deputy
Province of Europe

